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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the need and provides guidelines for the preparation of policy statements on reference collection development for academic libraries. Policy elements recommended for inclusion are statements on collection objectives, collection scope, physical size, types of material, selector roles, removal procedures, and interdepartmental relationships. Criteria for the selection, retention, or removal of reference materials are provided, and a bibliography of 12 titles is attached. (RAA)

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ACADEMIC REFERENCE COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

POLICY STATEMENTS

by

Barbara Lehocky

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ACADEMIC REFERENCE COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY STATEMENTS

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A proliferation of articles has appeared in the professional journals describing the need for comprehensive plans and written policy statements for collection development activities in American libraries. The American Library Association Collection Development Committee of the Resources Section, Resources and Technical Services Division, was established in part, "to develop guidelines for the definition of selection policies." In July of 1974, the committee appointed task forces to address specific activities of the collection development process and to formulate guidelines relating to those activities in an effort to nationally coordinate the development of American library collections.

The need for national coordination and cooperation is evident, and due in large measure to widespread budgetary constraints which have afflicted all categories of libraries, in all regions of the country. The growth of resource-sharing networks and the increased volume of inter-library loan transactions attest eloquently to the consequences of library fiscal reversals in recent years.

The "Guidelines for the Formulation of Collection Development Policies" were published by the Collection Development Committee in *Library Resources & Technical Services*, Vol. 21, no. 1, Winter 1977. Guideline section 2.23 establishes the need for "detailed analysis of collection development policy for form collections."[2] It is interesting to note that while a seven-item list was detailed for "examples of forms for which special policy statements may be needed,"[3] reference materials were not mentioned. This was probably due to an oversight, or the use of a definition of reference items which precluded their inclusion on a philosophical basis.

After the development of an overall collection policy, probably the most useful and universally needed policy statement would be one for the collection of the reference department or area of a library. Every library has a selection of reference materials even when there is no formally established department to provide access to those resources. Interestingly enough, out of the 70 library collection development policies published by public, academic, college and school libraries in three anthologies of such policies, not one included a reference collection development policy statement.

"In recent years a number of academic library reference departments have recognized the need for additional guidelines in order to maintain an effective reference collection."[4] This statement is quoted from the only published article on reference collection policies found after a careful survey of *Library Literature* covering the years 1933 to August, 1978. In it, the authors Kathleen Coleman and Pauline Dickinson have provided a much needed public service by publishing a brief (two-page) introduction and a six-page copy of the policy that the Reference Collection Committee of the San Diego State University Library developed.

It is clear that the necessity for reference collection policies closely parallels that for overall library collection policies and that such policies can provide at least two additional significant benefits to a reference department.

Policies are intended to serve as planning tools and communications devices. In its communications function a policy can help to "train new reference librarians by clarifying some reference department goals."[5] It does this by informing the new reference librarian of the purpose, scope, and nature of the collection, and the future plans for its development. This function can of course also transcend departmental boundaries and help in the establishment of a library-wide understanding of the needs and plans for part of the library's acquisitions budget.

The appropriate and equitable division of all too meager library funds is of professional concern to responsible librarians. A written reference collection statement ensures an understanding of the financial needs of the reference collection and provides the information necessary to assist in the administrative budgetary allocation process.

A reference collection policy can additionally serve in the management of reference operations by establishing goals and standards for the acquisition and removal of reference materials. This "enables selectors to work with greater consistency toward defined goals, thus shaping stronger collections and using limited funds more wisely."[6] It will establish the basis for an effective reference collection, and review of the policy according to some systematically determined schedule will enable the assessment and realignment of the collection to meet the needs of reference clientele over time.

Included in a reference collection development statement should be some formulation of the following elements which have been selected from a variety of sources including the two articles previously mentioned. These elements should provide for an effective policy and an integrated coherent collection capable of meeting the informational needs of the collection's users.

Elements To Be Included in an Academic Reference Collection Policy Statement

I. Objectives of the reference collection, including:

   A. Description of clientele to be served
   B. Purpose of the collection

II. Scope of the reference collection, in relation to:

   A. Intellectual levels of clientele needs
   B. Subject boundaries of:

      1. Curriculum emphasis
      2. Administrative programs which require reference support

C. Priorities of the subject materials to be collected
D. Depth and intensity of materials to be collected by subject
E. Subjects and materials not included in the collection.

III. Physical size of the collection

IV. Types of materials included in the reference collection

A. Almanacs and yearbooks
B. Atlases and maps
C. Bibliographies
D. Biographies
E. Concordances
F. Dictionaries
G. Directories
H. Encyclopedias
I. Handbooks and manuals
J. Indexes and abstracts
K. Legal materials
L. Library catalogs
M. Medical materials

V. Statement as to the role of selectors of materials, including:

A. Definition of who is responsible for selection, and to what extent
B. Part to be played by approval plans
C. Procedures to be followed in the selection process

1. Selection tools to be used
2. Principles to govern the selection and evaluation of materials

VI. Removal of materials from the reference collection

A. Procedures to govern the weeding of the collection

1. Principles used to remove materials from the collection

VII. Relationships to other departments and/or libraries with regard to resource sharing

It is clear from the inclusion of elements relating to the removal of materials that it is a working assumption of this paper that collection development is defined as the selection, acquisition, and weeding of materials from a collection.

There is an integral relationship between the acquisition and removal of books in the development of the reference collection. Every item which is added should be considered in light of what is already held or lacking. In reverse, each removal is dependent upon new additions and changes in the overall or specific

subject scope of the collection as well as a host of other criteria.

The criteria which govern the decision-making process for the selection and subsequent acquisition of materials are very similar to those that govern the weeding of a collection.

"Periodic evaluation of the works already in the reference collection is as important as acquisition of new materials, since the reference collection consists of important, frequently consulted publications. Careful, regular, and sytematic weeding removes older, less desirable works from the reference collection."[7]

What follows is a discussion of the principles or criteria which should serve as guidelines for the selection and removal of materials from the reference collection. It is important to re-emphasize here that the utilization of these critera must be done in the context of the institution keeping in mind the nature and complexities of curriculum, faculty, and students unique to that institution. Materials which would be considered anathema because of difficulty level or price in one institution might well be considered pearls beyond price at another. No importance should therefore be assigned to the order of the following criteria.

Criteria To Serve As Guidelines in Deciding To Acquire and Remove Reference Titles

1. Significance and usefulness of the title
2. Authority and reputation of the author and publisher
3. Age and currency of the work and its contents
4. Favorable reviews in the professional literature
5. Inclusion of the title in reference guides
6. Difficulty level of the contents
7. Language of the publication
8. Price of the publication in relation to:
   a. Availability of the information contained
   b. Quality of physical production of the title
   c. Intended length of use
9. Anticipated frequency of use

An important corollary to the primary use of the last two criteria becomes particularly meaningful when viewed in terms of their relationships to intra- and inter-library resource sharing.

The "Guidelines" published by the ALA Collection Development Committee were in some part designed to promote and "assist librarians to select and de-select in conformity with regional needs and resources."[8] Individual reference departments would do well to consider the local availability of high-price, low-use titles. Judicious coordination of effort on the part of librarians responsible for reference collection development can result in the provision of better access to materials for users along with efficient use of dwindling acquisitions funds.

In conclusion, it becomes apparent that the development of academic reference collection development policies by college and university librarians would serve a number of valuable purposes:

1. It would provide a useful administrative planning and communications device which would help to ensure consistent, coordinated, and effective growth of an expensive collection.

2. It could serve to clarify reference goals and be an aid in the training of new reference librarians.

3. It could be an important step in the development of a local or regional resource-sharing network which would benefit all cooperating institutions in the provision of access to expensive, infrequently used materials for their patrons.

FOOTNOTES

1. American Library Association. Collection Development Committee, "Guidelines for the Formulation of Collection Development Policies," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 21 (Winter 1977): 40.

2. Ibid., p. 45.

3. Ibid., p. 45.

4. Kathleen Coleman and Pauline Dickinson, "Drafting a Reference Collection Policy," *College & Research Libraries* 38 (May 1977): 227.

5. Ibid., p. 227

6. American Library Association, p. 41.

7. Kathleen Coleman and Pauline Dickinson, p. 232.

8. American Library Association, p. 44.

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